DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 923 JC 920 353

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TITLE Using Institutional Effectiveness To Refocus the Institution's Efforts.
PUB DATE Jun 91
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Summer Institute on Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success (3rd, Greensboro, NC, June 23-25, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Accountability; *College Planning; *College Role; Community Colleges; Institutional Mission; *Organizational Climate; Organizational Objectives; Program Improvement; *School Effectiveness; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Jefferson State Community College AL

ABSTRACT

Jefferson State Community College (JSCC), in response to external requests for accountability, developed an institutional effectiveness plan which, while demonstrating accountability, was primarily designed to improve the programs and services of the college. JSCC's plan was comprised of three components: purposes, plans, and results. As the initial step in implementing the institutional effectiveness plan, 38 operational units, ranging from Executive Leadership to the Department of Safety and Security, were identified. These functional entities were chosen by the college rather than organizational units, since activities are conducted and plans implemented at these lower operational levels. Each unit wrote a purpose and commitments statement, which linked its purposes to fulfillment of the college purposes and described the functions performed by the unit in achieving those purposes. The next step was to identify the intended outcomes or expected results. The final step in clarifying the roles of the operational units involved discussions between the units and the deans to whom they answered. As a result of this effort, roles of the operational units and their relation to the college purposes were clarified. One unexpected outcome of the project was increased awareness, particularly in the areas performing primarily administrative services, of the fact that the units existed to serve students, even if only indirectly. The document includes a table of purposes/commitments/expected results for three operational units. (JMC)

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USING INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS TO REFOCUS THE INSTITUTION'S EFFORTS

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Presented at the 3rd Annual Summer Institute on
Institutional Effectiveness & Student Success
Greensboro, North Carolina
June 23-25, 1991

JC 920 353

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INTRODUCTION

During the past decade colleges and universities have been bombarded from all sides with calls for improved performance and accountability. "Blue ribbon" committees, educational associations, governors, legislatures, system governing or coordinating boards, regional accrediting agencies - all have been demanding increased effectiveness. The six regional accrediting agencies for postsecondary institutions, with the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools (SACS) leading the way, have revised their standards to require assessment which provides documentation that students are accomplishing educational objectives. For those institutions in the SACS region, a new section, Section III: Institutional Effectiveness, was added in 1985 to the Criteria for Accreditation with an accompanying shift in focus from resources and processes to outcomes and a demand that institutions demonstrate effectiveness. As a result, educational institutions throughout the country and in the South in particular have been very involved during the past few years in developing institutional effectiveness plans appropriate to their needs and/or to mandated requirements.

JEFFERSON STATE'S PLAN FOR INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Jefferson State accepted its responsibility as a public institution to respond to legitimate requests for accountability from external constituencies and agencies by providing accurate and appropriate data on its educational efforts. The College has rejected this, however, as the primary focus of its efforts related to institutional effectiveness: while the demonstration of accountability is important, it will not of itself lead to effectiveness. Therefore, the College has attempted to develop an institutional effectiveness plan which, while demonstrating accountability, will first and foremost result in improvement in the programs and services of the College.

Jefferson State's plan is comprised of three components - purposes, plans, and results - which are continuously modified and refined

through the processes of planning, implementation, and assessment (Figure 1). Each of these is an integral part of efforts to achieve effectiveness, and although, each has been developed and implemented separately, it is only when all are fully integrated that Jefferson State will emerge as a truly effective institution.

Numerous attempts to develop a flowchart that accurately illustrates the interrelationships and dynamics existing among the various components and processes in the College's plan have led to the realization that efforts to achieve effectiveness can not be represented in this way, no matter how many lines and arrows are used. The model used by physicists for light is a far more apt representation. Separated, wavelengths of light may appear red, blue, green or other colors. Each of these can be viewed and worked with separately, but it is not until they are "put back" together, that is, focused on the same point, that the colors merge to become white light. At Jefferson State there are times when the institution's efforts are focused on the identification of purposes and the outcomes or results that can be expected if these purposes are achieved. At other times, the focus may shift to planning and the development of plans through which the purposes may be achieved: at still other times, efforts may be concentrated on implementing plans. Even as the focus shifts and efforts are concentrated on one component, however, the others are still ongoing, and as white light emerges only when all the wavelengths are focused together, Jefferson State can emerge as a truly effective institutidn only when all components of the effectiveness plan are integrated and working together.

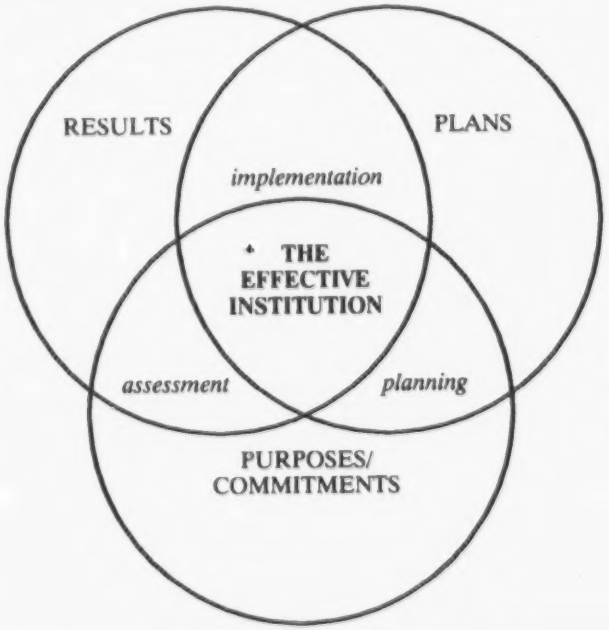

FIGURE 1: Jefferson State Community College Institutional Effectiveness Model

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THE NEED TO CLARIFY ROLES AND REFOCUS EFFORTS

Jefferson State is a comprehensive, public two-year community college of approximately 7,000 students located on the edge of the Birmingham city limits in the largest metropolitan area in Alabama. The College was established in 1965 as part of a statewide two-year college system which includes technical, junior, and community colleges. As with many other two-year colleges, there has been little mobility among the faculty and staff, and they are an aging group with the majority within five years of retirement.

Major organizational changes have been the rule rather than the exception at Jefferson State. Upper level administration at the College has always consisted of the president and several deans but number of deans and the responsibilities assigned to each dean has changed six times in the College's twenty-six year history. Three major changes in organizational structure due to changes at the deans' level have occurred in the last ten years, and there have been comparable numbers of changes at other levels within the organizational structure. Even the academic divisions, which are generally fairly stable, have varied from seven to ten in number with several changes in the composition of the disciplines making up each division.

Adding to the confusion caused by the frequent organizational changes on campus is the fact, that although there have been numerous changes in personnel positions and their locations on the organizational chart, there has been little turnover in personnel and often not enough money to replace those who did leave. As a result, responsibilities have often been assigned, not to the logical organizational unit, but to the individual available to assume the responsibility.

Even in the most stable organizations, as people settle into daily routines, subtle changes begin to occur in their perspective on their jobs, and in the expectations of others about their roles in the institution. Over time views tend to diverge, and, without realizing it organizational units may even come to be working at cross purposes because no one realizes that differences in expectations exist. Given the instability of the organizational structure during the past at Jefferson State, and the fact that two of the three deans are newly appointed to their positions, there existed a real need to look at the campus as a whole and clarify roles.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR EFFECTIVENESS BY DEFINING COMMITMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

The first step in implementing Jefferson State's effectiveness plan involved defining commitments in support of the college purposes and expectations for results of achieving them. The major outcome anticipated for this activity was that campus units would have a clearer understanding of their roles and that efforts to achieve college goals would be more effective as a result.

Guiding Principles

Three principles have guided this, as well as all other efforts, to achieve effectiveness at Jefferson State: (1) Always begin with what is already in existence, (2) Do it only if it will be useful, and (3) Always Involve the people affected. Jefferson State has been in existence for twenty-six years. No matter how desirable it might be to start with a clean slate in developing an institutional effectiveness plan for the institution, it is not feasible to start over. Therefore, each new effort has begun by defining things as they are. Everyone has a tendency to resist change, and with institutional effectiveness, the reasons for change are not always obvious at first. Efforts to implement change at Jefferson State have been most successful when people have been allowed to proceed from where they were; then, as they progressed to the next step and began to see a need they have become more willing to revise or change with some even doing so enthusiastically at times.

In keeping with the second principle, a decision was made early on that demonstrating accountability and remaining accredited were important, but anything done in the name of accountability or effectiveness was going to be done in a way that would improve Jefferson State. The third and final principle is evidenced in a commitment by the administration to involve the people affected, no matter how difficult and time-consuming the effort became. A plan developed without the involvement and ultimate acceptance by the people who are responsible for implementation has very little likelihood for success.

Defining Operational Unit Purposes and Commitments

In 1989 the college purposes statement was revised in order to make it clearer and more explicit. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to implement purposes at the institutional level, no matter how explicit the statements are, because colleges simply do not operate at that level. Activities are carried out and plans implemented at lower operational levels - by a department or office, a committee, or even by individual employees. It is only at these levels that the promises in purpose statements become more than just rhetorical statements. Therefore, if the institutional purposes are to be achieved, the college units operating at these levels have to clearly understand and accept responsibility for contributing to their achievement. Attempting to ensure that this happened at Jefferson State led immediately to a problem; a framework around which to organize efforts was needed. In many institutions the organizational structure would provide that framework; due to the factors described earlier, this would not entirely suffice at Jefferson State. The College decided that functional entities rather than organizational units provided a better framework, and thirty-eight operational units were identified. An operational unit was defined as any unit composed of one or more people who performed a clearly distinct function or group of closely related functions.

Each operational unit identified was asked to write a purpose and commitments statement (Table 1). The unit purpose relates the unit to the college purposes and reflects assigned responsibilities for specific sections of the College's purposes; it establishes the unit's role in the institution and summarizes its functions in very broad, general terms. The commitments are written as process statements which describe how each unit expects to achieve its purpose and those of the College for which it has accepted responsibility. Stated another way, the commitments are a list of the primary functions of a unit, those things that the unit does or provides in order to fulfill its purposes.

The guidelines for writing purposes/commitments statements and an explanation of how the statements fit into the college effectiveness plan were first presented to the operational unit heads in large groups. Then they were given the initial responsibility for identifying their purposes and commitments. In this way, their understanding of their units' roles and expectations could be expressed and, if any misunderstandings or hidden agendas existed, they would be brought into the open. However, a lesson learned from past experience with other projects was not to assume that everyone would be equally capable of putting their ideas on paper in the format required. So, after they had time to develop a first draft of their statements, the unit heads were divided into smaller groups to begin the process of revising and clarifying their drafts into appropriate statements. In some cases this worked well with the members of the group exchanging ideas and providing assistance to one another; in other cases, more one-on-one assistance was required.

A major problem in developing the commitments statements was the difficulty in separating the functions of the operational units from the special assignments. For example, one unit head had an additional assignment for coordinating graduation services that had nothing to do with his unit, yet he considered it a very important function. The basis for making decisions in these situations was to ask the question, "Would the function go with the individual if that person were to be transferred to another unit?" If the answer was yes, the function was not included in that unit's commitments.

Another problem was related to restricting the commitments to the primary functions of the unit. Many of the units had "commitments" such as providing staff development and hiring qualified personnel that were only indirectly related to the functions of the unit. The basis for making decisions here also was a question, "Is this a reason for the unit's existence?" If the answer was yes, the function was included; if the answer was no, it was left out.

Defining Expected Results

Reaffirmation of accreditation by SACS now requires institutions to shift their focus from processes and resources to outcomes and to demonstrate effectiveness through the achievement of these outcomes. Therefore, after the units had stated their purposes and the

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commitments by which they would achieve the purposes, the next step was to identify the intended outcomes or expected results, the "so what" of fulfilling the commitments. The expected results are the intended products, impact, or other observable outcome of an operational unit's actions as opposed to the processes by which the unit is committed to achieve the outcome.

A major difficulty encountered in writing the expected results was stating them as observable outcomes. Most of the unit personnel were much more comfortable with identifying processes rather than what the processes were to achieve. Again, questions were the most useful way of getting them to think in terms of outcomes. Asking "What will the student or client do?" or "What will change if this is done?" frequently would lead to appropriate wording for the expected results.

Reaching Concensus

The final step in clarifying the roles of the operational units involved discussions between the unit heats and the deans to whom they answered. Both had to agree that the purposes and commitments did, in fact, represent the unit's role at the College, and that the expected results were appropriate.

SUMMARY AND RESULTS

As the initial step in implementing an institutional effectiveness plan at Jefferson State thirty-eight operational units ranging from Executive Leadership to the Department of Safety and Security were identified. Each unit wrote a purpose and commitments statement which linked its purposes to fulfillment of the College purposes and described the functions performed by the unit it achieving its purposes and those of the College for which it had responsibility. The outcomes orientation stressed by SACS was incorporated into the effort by identifying expected results/intended outcomes for each unit commitment.

As a result of this effort, roles of the operational units and their relation to the College purposes were clarified. The dialogue engaged in by the unit heads and their supervisors resulted in the reduction of overlap in assumed responsibilities and, in some cases, responsibility for specific functions was more clearly defined. One unexpected outcome of this project was increased awareness, particularly in areas performing primarily administrative services, of the fact that the units existed to serve students, even if only indirectly.

Finally, caveats based on the experiences gained from this project are offered for those who may be organizing efforts similar to this:

1. Don't expect total cooperation or acceptance. Not everyone is going to buy into the effort, no matter how well-intended it is, and it is not necessary that everyone does.

2. Expect a certain amount of garbage at first, but take comfort in knowing that with patience it can be recycled and will improve as the reasons for improvement begin to become more apparent.

3. Expect some resentment because the initial feeling will be that "We are doing this for you, not us!" This too will change as the units begin to look at what they are doing from new perspectives and changes begin to occur.

TABLE 1. EXAMPLES OF PURPOSES/COMMITMENTS/EXPECTED RESULTS

OPERATIONAL UNIT 4: Instruction

PURPOSE: To implement the College purpose of "providing accessible educational programs through which students may obtain the skills and knowledge necessary to pursue their life's work and become educated members of society." In addition, the unit is dedicated to utilizing its unique resources in providing student support and building community partnerships. The unit is committed to achieving these purposes by:

EXAMPLE OF UNIT COMMITMENT: Requiring a core curriculum of general education designed to assist students in attaining those characteristics of an educated person as described in the College philosophy.

EXAMPLE OF EXPECTED RESULTS: All degree and certificate programs contain a core of general education courses.

OPERATIONAL UNIT 13: RECORDS

PURPOSE: To provide services related to the registration process and accurate documentation of student achievement.

EXAMPLE OF A UNIT COMMITMENT: Storing, maintaining and retrieving records in an efficient, accurate, and secure manner.

EXAMPLE OF EXPECTED RESULTS: Legitimate requests for records can be fulfilled in a timely and accurate fashion.

OPERATIONAL UNIT 16: STUDENT ACTIVITIES

PURPOSE: To enhance students' overall collegiate experience and provide additional opportunities for cultural and intellectual growth. The Office also accepts responsibility for contributing to a sense of collegiality with the College.

EXAMPLE OF A UNIT COMMITMENT: Providing opportunities for participation in the governance of the institution.

EXAMPLE OF EXPECTED RESULTS: Student leadership skills are enhanced for those who choose to participate.

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